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### Military Lives: Coaching Transitions

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## Military Lives: Coaching Transitions

### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is firstly to consider how veterans employ talk to shape interpretations of personal and social identity. Secondly, we seek to gain an understanding of how veterans see themselves in a civilian world, their ability to re-conceptualise and realign their perspective on life to support their transition in to a civilian world.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Underpinned by Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity, the work provides a qualitative analysis data from coaching interviews with 5 veterans

**Findings** – The findings revealed the on-going legacy of military life and how its distinctiveness and belief centred on kinship shapes personal identity and the way they see their civilian world. The work sheds light on to the benefits of this Ricoeur’s self-reflexive approach and how it can be used to provide a deeper insight in to the nature of personal transitions and how narrative can be used to expose complexities of the narratives of personal history and meaning as the narrator becomes both the seeker and what is sought.

**Practical implications** –the work reinforces the value of Ricoeur’s self-reflexive approach identifying narrative mediating between two ‘poles’ of identity and the act of mimesis; prefiguration, configuration and refiguration as veterans project stories of their world and their place within it.

**Originality/value** – The paper provides new insights in to the important of narrative identity broadening its potential application with engagement across diverse communities, thereby providing depth and rigour of its conceptual understanding of personal identity. The work further provides insights in to the challenges facing veteran to integrate within a civilian society.

**Keywords** –narrative identity, military veterans, coaching, Ricoeur

**Paper type** - Research paper

## Introduction

Military veterans often have considerably more problems in gaining and maintaining employment than their non-veteran peers (Poppyscotland, 2015). The point of transition between the military and civilian would appear to be very challenging for veterans, of liminal magnitude, as they have to find not only an alternative job but an alternative lifestyle (Walker, 2012) which may have severe and long-term consequences on their personal and economic well-being. Retirement from the military is a very different experience from retirement from conventional civilian life and even those well prepared, the cultural difference can come as a surprise as leaving military service can be felt as a severance from a deeply engrained way of being (Dryburgh, 2012; Fraser, 2015). This is a challenging life transition that impact on personal identify and undermining personal sense of meaning and life purpose, with 27% of leavers saying re-entry was difficult for them (Bergman, et al, 2014) and acknowledge a feeling of 'loss' (Jolly, 1996; Walker, 2012).

In short many veterans have long term issues in reconciling their civilian and military identity (Higate, 2001) which has a major impact on key life trajectories as they remain captives of their past (Higate, 2001) presenting challenges in recognising who they are (Teachman and Tedrow, 2007) but also stigmatising who they are not. This has a profound impact on their ability to fully engage in society; for example, it is reported that unemployment amongst veterans aged 18-49 is almost twice that of the non-veteran. Further UK veterans (aged 16-44 years) are three times more likely to have mental health disorders than non-veterans of the same age (Fear et al., 2010; Fossey, 2012) with a prevalence of depression and alcohol misuse a theme that has been occurring for many years (Fear et al., 2007; Fossey, 2010; Fox, 2010). Veterans who saw active service in Iraq or Afghanistan had substantial increase in risk of alcohol misuse, and reservists with similar service are nearly three times as likely to have PTSD (Iversen, 2009; Milliken, Auchterlonie and Hoge, 2007).

The purpose of this paper is twofold; firstly, to consider how veterans employ talk to shape interpretations of personal and social identify. Secondly, we seek to gain an understanding of how veterans see themselves in a civilian world, their ability to re-conceptualise and realign their perspective on life to support their transition in to a civilian world. We employ

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3 coaching as an enabler of transition and a source of research data. We begin with a  
4 consideration of Ricoeur's (1984) hermeneutic theory of narrative identity which underpins  
5 our approach to working with veterans.  
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### 10 **Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity and military lives**

11 Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity (1984; 1985) offers insights in to meanings and  
12 linguistic mediators in the shaping of identity, projecting narrative as a living concept which  
13 can be employed to gain greater insight into identity in organisational contexts (Brown,  
14 2001; Coupland, 2007). Narrative identity theory focuses on representing how we interpret  
15 reality and re-display it to ourselves throughout our lives. We create a self-reflexive  
16 framework that enables this construction of self. This is influenced by the interactions with  
17 others and is temporal in nature encompassing a multiplicity of ongoing revisions (Brown,  
18 1998) as the individual attempts to construct an ongoing dynamic yet coherent  
19 interpretation of self as they move through time and space taking on different roles and  
20 relationships (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995). It is also entwines in our actions and  
21 employment of cultural products such as car, cloths, titles etc.  
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33 Ricoeur refers to this process projection and imitation as "mimesis" creating reflections or  
34 interpretations of the real world. It involves the act of arranging of events that fashion a  
35 plot, that collates and narrates one's life experiences in order to make sense of the world  
36 setting its' own protocols and coherence. Constantly in a state of flux, looking back whilst  
37 projecting forwards, negotiating and adapting but contained within the author's temporal  
38 present (Ricoeur, 1992; Mallett and Wapshott, 2011).  
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45 Here we distinguish between ipse and idem identity, that is between 'the self' and 'the  
46 same' (Ricoeur, 1992: 117-8) or a generalised other that is dynamic and constructs roles in  
47 response to our interactions with others, who I am changing through time shaped to the  
48 needs to accommodate the generalised other, altering from moment to moment (ipse – the  
49 self). This retains a sense of sameness, with change going unnoticed but producing an  
50 evolving autobiography. Our fixed idem is shaped by our memories which in turn influences  
51 our expectations, and although we feel the same person, we are different, maintaining a  
52 sustained sense of selfhood (idem – the same) entwined narrative based episodic stories  
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3 that shapes us and re-shapes us without end (Ricoeur, 1991). This is a subtle journey,  
4 where the tensions of difference provide greater insight in to understanding the full  
5 dimensions and consequences of personal identity. It uncovers an inherent multiplicity in  
6 our personal identities governed by our perceptions of contexts; we perceive, act and  
7 present ourselves differently dependent on our needs, wants and goals. Each time our  
8 stories are told we present the potential of a multitude of cascading and competing  
9 narratives to be created, facilitating the enactment of an evolving story of overlapping and  
10 subsuming plots exerting a pervasive influence on our unfolding day-to-day life and world  
11 outlook.  
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21 Ricoeur, (1984) introduces St Augustine's 'threefold present' (the past, present and future)  
22 and Aristotle's Poetics and 'emplotment' and 'mimesis'; (prefigurations of collective  
23 references; (present) presenting competing fictions to be navigated and (the future) a re-  
24 configuration)). Presenting a subjective and complex interweaving of fictional and historical  
25 narrative interpreted from the narrator's perspective (as author and the subject) a flowing  
26 narrative fashioning a personal imaginative representation of the real world. A polyadic  
27 reflexivity (Laitinen, 2007) generating a dynamic and mediated narrative, continually  
28 integrating and mediating meaning (Mallett and Wapshott 2011). A narrative that moves  
29 between contrasting interpretations of the world and one's place within it, a shape-shifting  
30 epistemology that provides a broader plurality of meaning (Hefner, 2014) present radically  
31 contrasting interpretations and realignment challenges (Geertz, 1973).  
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42 Fluidity of personal interpretations can lever power to or from the author's past depending  
43 on the strength of their personal belief and the current context, presenting hegemonic  
44 tensions between individuals and their current dominated groups (Clegg, 1989) as a shared  
45 narrative is fashioned between groups (Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Brown et al., 2005).  
46 From this we develop our dispositions and life habits and social groupings, establishing our  
47 individual and collective actions and rituals, what we do and who we do it with.  
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54 Interpretations of being are idiosyncratic in nature but are also shaped by the local context  
55 and therefore can be seen to be constructed of and constituted by our local backgrounds.  
56 This includes our relations and interactions with others (Walker, 2012) thereby enacting a  
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3 transient self, a collaboratively shaped and constructed self that cannot be defined without  
4 reference to others (Ybema et al., 2009). Temporal definitions of who we are, 'who we  
5 want to be', who we are not an intersubjective and dialogical attainment of self that provide  
6 interpretations of meaning that are concurrently historically and culturally situated (Forster,  
7 2011) but gradually shifting.  
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12  
13 Ricoeur's theory has considerable relevance to veterans and how they engage in their  
14 civilian employment and how they reflect on their past and future through the prism on  
15 now. Personal identity is shaped through subtle socialisation processes (Sveningsson and  
16 Alvesson, 2003) as individuals continually review their sense of self. This is fashioned by  
17 their personal desires set within context to the social interactions with others, therefore  
18 they are exposed to the challenges of the background organisational context (Ybema et al.,  
19 2009).  
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28 Higate (2012) provides insight in to the nature and extent of military and militarized  
29 masculinity across a range of contexts from the war to the mundane and every day (Arkin  
30 and Dobrovsky 1990; Higate and Henry 2009). Militarised practice, tradition and espoused  
31 values contribute to the construction of intra-masculine bonds within a wider hierarchy of  
32 men through norm-bound practices that cement through time and space heteronormative  
33 relations among its members.  
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40 The importance of developing a strong group cohesion and commitment as a means of  
41 gaining a sustain advantage in a warzone cannot be underestimated, however this not  
42 attained without running the risk of broader personal and social consequences, as there will  
43 be unintended, consequences of training individuals in the art of physical combat. for  
44 example, groups create inter-group hierarchies through framing the inferiority of 'others'  
45 thereby emphasising impression that the enemy is inferior to you can reinforced the belief  
46 that the ensuing combat will have a positive outcome.  
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54 As a means of deepening understanding of military identity the concept of fratriarchy  
55 provides insights (Dussel 2007). Fratriarchy describes a close relationships male group that  
56 is devoid of children or women. The roles of caring and sharing life with loved ones is also  
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3 absence from the immediacy of the group (Remy 1990). The group is pre-occupied with  
4 interest others than paternity and parenting (Hearn 1998). Such groups emanates  
5 patriarchal values male moral authority, social privilege and power control but unlike a  
6 father dominate groups here men rule as brothers providing an environment where men  
7 can compete but also provide a united front detached from the 'others' (Jordan and Cowan  
8 1995: 727).

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15 Evidence suggest that some members remain 'psychologically trapped in fraternal  
16 fellowship [with some] thriving on the conflict and aggression characteristic of . . . male  
17 association' (Jewkes 2005: 48 cited in Higate, 2012), and will seek out such fraternity  
18 linking back to their former military career.

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24 In Higate's research this related to Iraq deployed security firms but similar association can  
25 be made to other groups. For example, employment in uniformed services or civilian firms  
26 linked to the military, or joining associations and other groups i.e. reserve forces,  
27 regimental federations. This demonstrates the heteronormative draw of such groups;  
28 likewise such associating are not devoid of social or political context with the group  
29 reinforcing old legacies. Whilst one cannot make vast generalisation as to the impact these  
30 associations will make, it can be seen as a background or contributing factor to the  
31 challenges for veterans entering a civilian environment.

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40 Walker (2012) conducted research with 28 service personnel preparing to leave the military,  
41 identifying five category 'Constructive Typology' of pre-exit orientations:-

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45 a) **Transformed:** - those who suggested that they were better or superior to civilian and  
46 that they would deal with the transition process, were committed to the chance and  
47 that the military had made them in to what they are a real soldier; a pragmatic  
48 individual a cut above (civilians) that will wade in and get things done.  
49  
50 b) **Soldier Scam:** - those that felt there were not "real soldiers" (mainly from non-teeth  
51 arms i.e. infantry or armoured regiments) in part they distanced themselves from  
52 the stereotypical military figure.  
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3 c) **No-difference:** - those who claimed service has had little effect on self-conceptions,  
4 these individual had limited career progression and had even gave examples of  
5 discipline problems, but still conformed to the system across the length of their  
6 service.  
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10 d) **Disavowed:** - a routine change in their life rendered continuing in service untenable  
11 – this included marriage or childbirth.  
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13 e) **Blighted:** - a disruptive events forced a changed injury, ill-health trauma and mental  
14 illness, potentially detached from current circumstances.  
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18 The typology provides a range of interpretations of personal history underpinning different  
19 but consistent narratives of army life from which future career and life style projections  
20 grow. Walker's work reinforced the sustained belief in a military identify, which in part  
21 projects a stable coherence of who they are, their contribution and who they are not. Even  
22 though their individual military experiences were very different and provide different career  
23 trajectories, there was still a common underpinning belief.  
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30 Critical is the understanding that this military coherence or common and idiosyncratic  
31 congruence needs to provide a positive yet realistic perspective of the current and future  
32 self thereby providing the essential building blocks and readiness and preparedness to move  
33 from a relatively stable career environment to a more uncertain and looser career and life  
34 style.  
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#### 41 **Methodology**

42 A subjectivist ontology was adopted employing an interpretivist epistemology to give  
43 emphasis to the nature and form of local and specific co-constructed realities, which  
44 enabled the research to expose insights as to meaning-shaping through the dynamics of  
45 social relationships between individuals (Burr, 2003). This enabled the reflexive multiplicity  
46 of interpretations developing the context, depth, and local knowledge (Ramey & Grubb,  
47 2009), through the medium of language simultaneously constructs and is constructed by a  
48 local reality (Gee, 2005). This brings to the foreground interpretive and co-authored  
49 reflexive processes as a way to explore participants' constructs of meaning with specific  
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3 reference to a more polyadic reflexivity allowing sharing and deliberating on a number of  
4 interpretations of meanings.  
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8 A coaching intervention was selected as a suitable time, environment and engagement  
9 format, with its focus on the individual and its emphasis on gaining deep learning insights  
10 through the development of a support and authentic interpersonal dialogue. Coaching  
11 interventions enable others to gain and share deeper insights in to their world, from which  
12 they can develop new ways of interpreting, feeling and engaging with life and their situation  
13 (Schein, 2006). This is gained through the medium of facilitating a supportive dialogue and  
14 honest feedback (Garvey and Garrett-Harris, 2008); it provides a foreground for the coachee  
15 to build awareness and sense-making that helps the coachee to grow (Bluckert, 2006;  
16 Reissner, 2008). Participants were made aware of the context and value of the research and  
17 that they would retain anonymity and informed consent was sought and gained.  
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28 The work is based on the coaching of five veterans from infantry backgrounds, who have a  
29 similar range of experiences with length of service ranging from 8-15 years. All had a  
30 minimum of 6 years veteran experience in relatively low skilled occupations. The two  
31 periods provided participants with sufficient time to have developed a clear identification  
32 with the military and to have experience of transition in to civilian working environments.  
33 This provided an opportunity to explore their past and current perceptions of self, their  
34 experience of civilian life and the potential legacies and echoes of the personal identity  
35 military service had endowed them. The coaching method, with its developmental ethos,  
36 encouraged participants to fully engage in the conversations which were later analysed  
37 developing the themes of enquiry employing a similar method employed by Walker (2012)  
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47 The emphasis on meaning required a journey of narrative exploring the veterans' pasts  
48 (military and civilian), present, and anticipated future. The environment provided a  
49 collegiate and familiar space to build rapport to encourage participants to freely articulate  
50 their stories. Quasi-civilian/military vernacular was evident and employed to elucidate  
51 events and enrich meaning. Profanities or military idioms were not discouraged but  
52 appreciated as part of their linguistic repertoire helping participants to provide depth and  
53 make sense of their world.  
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## Analysis of Findings

We provide a selection of micro-narrative extracts from conversations with all five veterans which have been grouped in to two sections; firstly veterans' reflections on the past and secondly their reflections on the present and future to provide insights in to their interpretations of the world.

### 1. Reflections on the Past

#### a. Participant A (Ex-Warrant Officer - postman):

*I enjoyed my time in the army, I made some good friends.*

*We knew how to work and play hard, ... there were bad days; weather conditions did not help but you all mucked in and you knew who you could rely on particularly when the chips were down.*

*I still miss the old days but I don't think I would go back. I am quite a bit older now, and I am not as fit.*

*It was good to work in the regiment ... you felt you were really doing something that mattered.*

#### b. Participant B (Ex-Sergeant – lorry driver):

*I am proud of my regiment what we did, we always got the job done ... I think we made a difference.*

*I've done my bit now.*

*I felt it taught me about leadership and commitment, but also what trust is all about.*

#### c. Participant C (Ex-Sergeant – warehouse worker):

*Had a blood good time, running up and down the hills, lots of action, shooting and beer!*

*I had some good NCO's who really knew their stuff and could be relied on ... we knew how to get the job done.*

*I remember one time one of the Junior NCO's got burnt, pretty bad ... we had to do first aid and get him evacuated pronto ... worked like a dream, good team we know what to do. We also had some good back up ... good planning and execution ... the kit was there when we needed it ... never get that in civvy land.*

#### d. Participant D (Ex-Sergeant – retired businessman):

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3 *Difficult to say why they were good times, it was tough. But we always got the job done ... it*  
4 *seemed to bring us together ... living together 24/7 you get to know your buddies ... you sort*  
5 *of know what they are thinking ... a team.*

6  
7  
8 *Just a good set of mates.*

9  
10 *I miss it but life moves on.*

11 **e. Participant E (Ex-Sergeant – driver):**

12  
13 *I really enjoyed the adventure and team work ... living life to the full. I felt we made a*  
14 *difference.*

15  
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18 All five extracts demonstrated a journey into their personal histories. Firstly by invoking  
19 images of a past masculine self; extracts such as “*work and play hard*”, “*when the chips were*  
20 *down*”, “*living life to the full*”, “*good times, it was tough*” and “*I am not as fit*”. These  
21 stories’ also demonstrated undertones reinforcing both a deep seated comradeship and  
22 fraternal association with their peers and the development of a sense of purpose “*really*  
23 *doing something that mattered*”. Combined with evidence of collective shared hardship  
24 reinforcing a key theme “*there were bad days*” ... “*mucked in*”, “*knew who you could rely*  
25 *on*”, “*when the chips were down*”, “*the kit was there when we needed it*” marking their place  
26 in time. Marking a personal and collective presence in time and space, of making a stand in  
27 a challenging world where you and your peers are collaboratively accountable to each other  
28 and can be relied upon. Clearly these personal reflections invoke a series of properties that  
29 the individual applies to themselves, ones that are reinforced through the interpretations  
30 and reinterpretations of events of their past, a re-construction and personal authorship of  
31 their personal and possible heroic self. There was a great drive on getting things done,  
32 demonstrating professional skills, and that they were well trained to surmount the tasks set,  
33 that worked within strong ‘band of brothers’ relationship noting this as a fictive kinship but  
34 also providing an authenticity of collaborative action. They stood together (when an almost  
35 fictive others did not) and that they rose to the call and stood at a significant event,  
36 projecting the image of the military as a personal calling rather than employment  
37 (Biderman, 1959).  
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3 This identifies themes and differentiates from who they are not, reinforcing a time and a  
4 state of *civilian other*, those who did not and were not. Such statements were absent when  
5 describing their civilian past, reinforcing different relationships and sense of purpose.  
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10 We can also notw how "the regiment" provides a specific personal reference point, not to  
11 the military but to the individual's corps or Battalion, a much more specific branch. This links  
12 to Walker (2012) typology where the participant holds themselves as being "real" soldiers  
13 having seen action and therefore holding authentic credentials rather than a "soldier scam".  
14 The latter are those who in part claim they are not real soldiers, i.e. those holding an  
15 appointment as a clerk or working in a back office role in the military, presenting a  
16 difference from what they would define as a hard extreme military profile. The former can  
17 present an image that the military has permanently changed them for the good and that  
18 they are "a cut above" (p.293) who will make their mark on the world as they get things  
19 done.  
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29 One also can suggest that these narratives demonstrated a nostalgic reminiscence of the  
30 past, "*I still miss the old days*" and a realisation that things had moved on, "*I don't think I*  
31 *would go back*" but with a justification of being "*not as fit*", possibly suggesting a loss of a  
32 masculine status and personal pride.  
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38 What is apparent is that narrative identity was derived from deeds and activities, the action  
39 of being a soldier, in what you do, who you were with, where you were at important  
40 moments in time and the hardship you suffered. This can be seen to challenge the current  
41 notions of military identities as being based on factors such as race or class following similar  
42 themes to Woodward and Jenkins (2011) but this is also reinforcing the notion that people  
43 are practical beings (Ricoeur 1984) and we identify with what we do.  
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## 51 2. Reflections on the Present and Future

### 52 a. Participant A (Ex-Warrant Officer - postman):

53 *I enjoy being a postman like to get out and about ... keeps me fit ... don't get a lot*  
54 *(remuneration) but with my pension I'm fine ... I'm really just looking for retirement*  
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3 I would tell them to get their arse in gear! (joke), they need to give some leadership and  
4 commitment to their people.

5  
6 It's like watching children at play – sometimes just hopeless.

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8 **b. Participant B (Ex-Sergeant – lorry driver):**

9  
10 I enjoy my job and there is nothing really wrong with being a civvy ... sometime I feel it is not  
11 enough ... definitely not exciting ... but the pay is good and I enjoy being with the family.

12  
13 Sometimes I do feel there are lots of meetings, lots of talking but no one really gets on with  
14 it.

15  
16 Don't think that grasp what leadership is all about.

17  
18 **c. Participant C (Ex-Sergeant - warehouse worker):**

19  
20 It is nothing like the military in civvy world ... they do their best but they really do not have  
21 team work, you need to live with folk to really get that.

22  
23 "They only have one pace ... don't seem to get urgent".

24  
25 I'm just a driver ... I don't have to be particularly motivated at work ... don't think they have  
26 any idea of what I have done ... offered to do stuff but they do not get it"

27  
28 "Think I could help on the planning and speeding up lead times ... also could motivate the  
29 troops ... bit stronger leadership

30  
31 "I think I have many skills I could offer them ... but it is too much effort"

32  
33 **d. Participant D (Ex-Sergeant – retired businessman):**

34  
35 I know with my business I could get contracts because I could turn things around quickly and  
36 I did a good job, think it gave me a lot of advantage ... I just got on with it and the clients like  
37 this.

38  
39 Often the clients had simple problems but just could not get their act together ... I think my  
40 ex-military experience gave me considerable advantage.

41  
42 I was willing to stick my neck out and take a chance and get on with it something they  
43 seemed unwilling to do.

44  
45 **e. Participant E (Ex-Sergeant – driver):**

46  
47 Works OK but I do not feel as motivated as when I was in the regiment. When I left I was  
48 under no delusion of what I was coming to.

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54 Clear use and distinctions were made by veterans of their time in the military past and their  
55 civilian present, a theme that has cascaded through the transition process with military

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3 personnel not expected to gain high levels of satisfaction from their civilian occupation (Jolly  
4 1996).

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8 There appeared to be a clear conflict between perceptions of what 'real' team-work or  
9 leadership is supposed to be (military) and what civilians practice, with comments such as;  
10 "*watching children at play*", "*sometimes just hopeless*", and "*really do not have team work*".  
11  
12 There was a constant comparison to their past for final definitions and examples of how  
13 they understood real teamwork, with a focus on getting things done, demonstrating an  
14 inference that civilians could not quite get it right.  
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20 This also created personal challenges with the "civilian other" reinforced by; "*they do not*  
21 *get it*", "*they only have one pace*", "*no one really gets on with it*", "*get their arse in gear*",  
22 "*like watching children at play*", "*sometimes just hopeless*" "*bit stronger leadership*" and "*I*  
23 *just got on with it*". The stories positioned the military as being the superior route but also  
24 demonstrated a background belief that the civilian way was either wrong or not fully  
25 appropriate and that civilians needed more motivation, projecting an implication of  
26 inferiority. Further there appeared to be an absence of fictive kinship impacting on their  
27 sense of belonging; it can be suggested that in part this is something they have come to  
28 terms with but there is a missed element to their 'lives' for this relationship and it may well  
29 block developing civilian relationships. What was interesting was the comment, "*but it is*  
30 *too much effort*", almost abrogating a responsibility to actively engage in their civilian world,  
31 becoming complacent to their fate.  
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44 What did appear in all cases was not an alienation to the civilian world but a passive  
45 acceptance of events. Walker's (2012) work on final year soldiers identified that they  
46 anticipated a down scaling of job role, personal status and a feeling of loss creating a sense  
47 of anxiety for their future which could invoke a process of confirmation bias (Nickerson,  
48 1998) therefore their past experience shapes both how they see the world and what they  
49 will expect to see. It was obvious that their current world shaped their expectations but the  
50 degree of influence from the past was significant and building on the work of Walker,  
51 reinforced the important influence their past had on their aspirations of career progression  
52 as a civilian/veteran.  
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5 What did appear was a conflicting desire to be back in but lack of willingness to want to  
6 actually do it, likewise their history was used both to enhance their status but also to  
7 reminisce on how that world was providing a certainty and moral position. What was  
8 apparent were no reflections on the bad times in the forces; this could indicate a degree of  
9 selective and possibly embellished authorship, a reseeded of vivid memories of the past, a  
10 key feature of Ricoeur's Narrative Identity. Even though the past is itself can be seen to be  
11 an unstable and fleeting, it provided a point of reference to contrast their civilian present, a  
12 platform to base current and future interactions upon. In so doing, this creates a dynamic  
13 tension that challenges and redefines preconceived constructs that initially appear stable  
14 but are temporal and illusive and thereby undermining the core of veteran's sense of self  
15 and there by create greater vulnerability. The comment, "*but it is too much effort*", could  
16 well demonstrate the impact of the clash of identities has on the veteran with a defence  
17 mechanism of disengage being a consequence of this. Veterans clearly demonstrated acts  
18 of reflexive identity accessing their past in part to interpret and make sense of their current  
19 position and future, it was clear history showed a strong regard or even yearning for the  
20 past and was employed to benchmark and reinforce and a coherent sense of self. Veterans  
21 made references to status, teamwork and the 'civvy' other, which clearly reinforced  
22 parallels to the dynamic of convergence or divergence between national militaries and their  
23 civil societies (Moskos, 1977).

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Few indicated great trouble in gaining employment but few indicated that they felt the jobs  
they undertake were on a par to their regular roles; this point of references did not appear  
to help them in their transition, reinforcing the work Jolly, (1996), Wolpert, (2000) and  
Walker, (2012).

### Discussion

The interviews exposed how stories act as key instruments that establish and reinforce  
personal and social identity. Further, the influence of Ricoeur's threefold mimesis was  
evident across the interviews, firstly uncovering the power and legacy of a pre-narrative  
framework (mimesis state 1, (predating the individual)) reinforcing traditions and providing  
collective references (idem) from which the present (mimesis state 2) will be viewed.



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5 The 'mimesis state 2' presents competing and socially contextualising interpretations that  
6 shape self-identity through culturally and socially mediated self-definitions, drawn from  
7 their new civilian world, that influence the re-seeing of self (ipse) and the past (selfhood and  
8 sameness). However, the author is both object and storyteller (in the present both lived  
9 and told (Ricoeur, 1991)) influencing accounts of events and circumstances (Ricoeur, 1987)  
10 though a blurring of constituting events, entwining facts and fictions, the author and the  
11 reader presenting a flux of vying interpretations. In turn this struggle of the past and  
12 present influences (mimesis state 3) a re-configuration and projection of the future.  
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21 One of the opportunities is for the coach to help the coachee to explore their journey as  
22 both object and storyteller (Ricoeur, 1992) but to raise awareness that the coachee is the  
23 recipient of such story's and how they influence the shaping of life projections. Such  
24 narrative based approach might encourage academics and practitioners alike to apply a  
25 more holistic and reinvigorated approach to organizational theory (Czarniawska, 1998) by  
26 providing insights in to the power of collective and personal narratives that fashion story's  
27 that embed meaning, purpose and expectations in everyday working life.  
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35 Such insights can reinforce their role of the coach as co-author who can help reseal the  
36 narratives of the past to uncover a positive present, which then can enable an attainable  
37 vision of the future.  
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42 In context to the veteran and their past, it would be difficult to see a more institutionally  
43 socialised group who through the establishment of traditions gain a clear sense of personal  
44 identity set within a stable organisational context. The challenges of this deeply engrained  
45 past identity is that they are temporal in nature and therefore presents the potential to  
46 create long-term post-exit vulnerability.  
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52 All participants indicated a loss of social status and a fictive kinship but also an undermining  
53 of personal values and purpose. The nature of belief in their distinctiveness (Biderman,  
54 1959) to the level of calling and the importance of they placed on their 'pragmatic', 'will do'  
55 attitude reinforce a hero like self. The work raises important questions as to the nature and  
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3 consequences of such fundamental lifestyle change and how this loss of the past  
4 undermines self-worth and vision of the future, as such can present challenges when they  
5 perceive they are embarking on a 'non-distinctive' civilian second a career.  
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8 An area overlooked in other research is the nature of veteran's pre-services past. What was  
9 apparent from discussion was a strong association with historically situated and male  
10 dominated social class backgrounds and how this affected their lives. Association can be  
11 seen to hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmid, 2005), whilst the concept is not  
12 without criticism military institutions do reinforce strong masculine traits a pattern echoed  
13 in working class society. Veterans often re-enter such family and social groups on leaving  
14 the military, presenting dual stories that reinforce old stereotypes shaping the past in the  
15 present.  
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24 Veterans do provide a distinct example of the challenges these groups face in transition but  
25 these are not alone. Most individuals will have backgrounds that influence their personal  
26 identity that which may hamper life transition. Therefore, Rancour's work can contribute to  
27 a range of contexts, from coaching elite groups through career transition such as in lost  
28 status through bankruptcy, redundancy or retirement or in supporting cultural or lifestyle  
29 transition for example for immigrants, refugees or those suffering from trauma. It can also  
30 help a coach's own life journey and that of their relationship with coachees, particularly in  
31 gaining insights in to the magnitude of the change and challenges they encounter.  
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40 The impact of personal identity can be profound, it was evident that all veterans reached  
41 deep in to their past to benchmark their current work roles. It was also evident that he  
42 process of life style change many still retained their ties to the regiment by attendance at  
43 regimental day, federations, social media or special events such as the annual remembrance  
44 parade. However, such connections could be a double-edged, both helping veterans adjust  
45 to civilian life by providing a support but also reinforcing a deep kinship old comrades who  
46 inadvertently reinforce generic stereotypes.  
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54 Generally, military careers provides secure, stable and coherent social framework that  
55 reinforces an institutionalised self-belief and commitment to a common cause, reinforcing a  
56 communitarian theme. The initial commitment for a recruit is set by the public  
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3 proclamation of an oath of allegiance, swearing by God *“to be faithful and bear true*  
4 *allegiance”* to the monarch (state), as if a personal calling. This is reinforced through recruit  
5 training, entering the regimental system and wearing a common uniform systemically  
6 reinforcing a common collective identity setting them apart from others and fashions a  
7 common sense of self and collective purpose and establishing accepted norms and rules for  
8 personal conduct. Such rules are reinforced through the system and by peer influence  
9 creating a social web that can constrain or enable on human action imposed through a  
10 constant living and cohesive narrative that reinforce a common social state. This not only  
11 define what is or is not permitted, but also who is included and excluded and thereby who is  
12 inferior and superior, reinforcing a past history and establishing a legacy of deep-seated  
13 beliefs that stay with an individual throughout their lives.  
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24 This sustained institutionalisation provides a background that fashion a cohesive sense of  
25 the individual and collective self (Walker, 2012) with individuals depicting themselves as  
26 self-reliant members of a warrior class, who have demonstrate their worthiness through  
27 their acts and deeds. Veterans can portray themselves as practitioners of a martial craft  
28 holding a ‘special’ professional craft, competent professionals who made a committed  
29 contribution to nationhood (Zirker et al; 2008). This reinforces the notion of personal  
30 presence, firstly that they were present at a significant national or global event and secondly  
31 they played as significant role in it, (Woodward and Jenkins, 2011) they stood and were  
32 accounted for alongside their ‘comrades in arms’ a band of brothers reinforcing a close  
33 fictive kinship. This has considerable significance as this also infers who was not there and  
34 therefore are excluded group the ‘civvy’ reinforced in social culture *“shall think themselves*  
35 *accurs'd they were not here, and hold their manhood cheap”* (Shakespeare, 1559, Act IV  
36 Scene iii 18–67).  
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49 Such self-authored belief system that veterans ascribed to themselves sets their future  
50 legacy, for example, many leavers have low expectations of becoming civilians (Walker,  
51 2012) living in a world of parochial and mundane which can invoke many challenges for  
52 personal adjustment unleashing feelings of anxiety, fear, despair and shame. Such  
53 perspectives expose veterans to the perils of confirmatory bias which limit expectations and  
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3 life trajectories, summoning the need for a more informed and critical introspective to be  
4 taken, often lacking in leavers (Jolly, 1996).  
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8 All interviewees expressed feelings of loss and a nostalgia for what had been, they  
9 expressed their acceptance for their civilian predicament and acknowledge that they had to  
10 adjust to the demands of civilian life.  
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15 As the veteran takes on the role of author, their stories of the past and projections of the  
16 future can evolve. Identity is constructed in a social context through discourse with others  
17 raising the need for arbitration and reconciliation as they negotiating meaning to make  
18 sense of their new worlds. This exposes veterans to a dynamic tension of instability and  
19 inequity that can expose inherent vulnerability to the shaping of their (and continually  
20 moving) post-exit identity. Veterans are exposed to new peers who have minimal  
21 experience of a military world, who will have difficulty in comprehending or valuing a  
22 veteran's history, experience, emotional exposure or social/moral worth presenting  
23 challenges of conflicting dialogue and understanding.  
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33 All 5 veterans had links to veteran associations and whilst these provided support they also  
34 presented the dilemma of a counter narrative, allowing them to reinforce and re-play their  
35 past story's with their old peers. Here the relationships reinforce the echoes of the past  
36 rekindle kinships and faith with the cause.  
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42 Delving in to a veterans 'pre-enlistment' past we see a deeper social legacies as educational  
43 attainment among soldiers is much lower than the national average (MoD, 2004) as many  
44 enlistees come disproportionately from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds  
45 (DCSF, 2009:31) some with increased risk of social exclusion (Agulnik et al., 2002) and others  
46 joining the military as a last resort. What this exposes is that their past is more than their  
47 military service and their 'pre-enlistment' state may present a default position on returning  
48 to a civilian world, a secondary default position, assumed as a static place but one that has  
49 now moved on, presenting a double loss and the potential of having nowhere to go.  
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## 58 **Conclusion**

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3 The research contribution is that it provided insight into how veterans' past and current  
4 background provides a rich framework for the conceptualisation of military identities. In  
5 line with previous studies veterans' narratives stress their uniqueness and difference as  
6 resilient action orientated individuals which also provides insight as to how veterans see  
7 civilian others. The work reinforced the conceptualisations of military identities how their  
8 social categories emerged within the lived military experience, this in turn present legacies  
9 for future life. It also reinforces how through talk we can gain vivid insights in to how these  
10 relationships and identities unfold.  
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19 Ricoeur's work refocused our attention at a micro level and through talk we can explore  
20 subjectivities of veterans personal military identities unfold. Providing valuable insights in to  
21 the nature of veterans past (idem) and the tensions and challenged they experience through  
22 their day-to-day lives. The work reinforces and extends the work of Woodward and Jenkins  
23 (2003) that veteran identities link to practice and the act of being present, taking a moral  
24 stand, but also demonstrates the ongoing influence of the patriarchy (Higate, 2003). Finally,  
25 the work supports Walker (2012) research 'constructive typology' particularly individuals  
26 who described themselves as cut above civilians. What was also apparent was a nostalgic  
27 sense of loss for the past and a need for recognition.  
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36 The works provides another perspective from which to understand, engage and employ a  
37 pool of human resources that may well be overlooked and undervalued.  
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## Military Lives: Coaching Transitions

### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is firstly to consider how veterans employ talk to shape interpretations of personal and social identity. Secondly, we seek to gain an understanding of how veterans see themselves in a civilian world, their ability to re-conceptualise and realign their perspective on life to support their transition in to a civilian world.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Underpinned by Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity, the work provides a qualitative analysis data from coaching interviews with five veterans

**Findings** – The findings revealed the on-going legacy of military life and how its distinctiveness and belief centred on kinship shapes personal identity and the way they see their civilian world. The work sheds light on to the benefits of this Ricoeur’s self-reflexive approach and how it can be used to provide a deeper insight in to the nature of personal transitions and how narrative can be used to expose complexities of the narratives of personal history and meaning as the narrator becomes both the seeker and what is sought.

**Practical implications** –the work reinforces the value of Ricoeur’s self-reflexive approach identifying narrative mediating between two ‘poles’ of identity and the act of mimesis; prefiguration, configuration and refiguration as veterans project stories of their world and their place within it.

**Originality/value** – The paper provides new insights in to the importance of narrative identity broadening its potential application with engagement across diverse communities, thereby providing depth and rigour of its conceptual understanding of personal identity. The work further provides insights in to the challenges facing veterans to integrate within a civilian society.

**Keywords** –narrative identity, military veterans, coaching, Ricoeur

**Paper type** - Research paper

## Introduction

Military veterans often have considerably more problems in gaining and maintaining employment than their non-veteran peers (Poppyscotland, 2015). The point of transition between the military and civilian would appear to be very challenging for veterans, of liminal magnitude, as they have to find not only an alternative job but an alternative lifestyle (Walker, 2012) which may have severe and long-term consequences on their personal and economic well-being. Retirement from the military is a very different experience from retirement from conventional civilian life and even to those well prepared, the cultural difference can come as a surprise as leaving military service can be felt as a severance from a deeply engrained way of being (Dryburgh, 2012; Fraser, 2015). This is a challenging life transition that impacts on personal identify and undermines a personal sense of meaning and life purpose with 27% of leavers saying re-entry was difficult for them (Bergman, et al, 2014) and acknowledge a feeling of 'loss' (Jolly, 1996; Walker, 2012).

In short many veterans have long term issues in reconciling their civilian and military identity (Higate, 2001) which has a major impact on key life trajectories as they remain captives of their past (Higate, 2001) presenting challenges in recognising who they are (Teachman and Tedrow, 2007) but also stigmatising who they are not. This has a profound impact on their ability to fully engage in society; for example, it is reported that unemployment amongst veterans aged 18-49 is almost twice that of the non-veteran. Further UK veterans (aged 16-44 years) are three times more likely to have mental health disorders than non-veterans of the same age (Fear et al., 2010; Fossey, 2012) with a prevalence of depression and alcohol misuse a theme that has been occurring for many years (Fear et al., 2007; Fossey, 2010; Fox, 2010). Veterans who saw active service in Iraq or Afghanistan had substantial increases in risk of alcohol misuse, and reservists with similar service are nearly three times as likely to have Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Iversen, 2009; Milliken, Auchterlonie and Hoge, 2007).

The purpose of this paper is twofold; firstly, to consider how veterans employ talk to shape interpretations of personal and social identify. Secondly, we seek to gain an understanding of how veterans see themselves in a civilian world, their ability to re-conceptualise and realign their perspective on life to support their transition in to a civilian world. We employ

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3 coaching as an enabler of transition and a source of research data. We begin with a  
4 consideration of Ricoeur's (1984) hermeneutic theory of narrative identity which underpins  
5 our approach to working with veterans.  
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### 10 **Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity and military lives**

11 Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity (1984; 1985) offers insights in to meaning and the role  
12 of linguistic mediators in the shaping of identity, projecting narrative as a living concept  
13 which can be employed to gain greater insight into identity in organisational contexts  
14 (Brown, 2001; Coupland, 2007). Narrative identity theory focuses on representing how we  
15 interpret reality and re-display it to ourselves throughout our lives. We create a self-  
16 reflexive framework that enables this construction of self. This is influenced by the  
17 interactions with others and is temporal in nature encompassing a multiplicity of ongoing  
18 revisions (Brown, 1998) as the individual attempts to construct an ongoing dynamic yet  
19 coherent interpretation of self as they move through time and space, taking on different  
20 roles and relationships (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995). It is also entwined in our actions and  
21 employment of cultural products such as car, clothes, titles etc.  
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33 Ricoeur refers to this process projection and imitation as mimesis creating reflections or  
34 interpretations of the real world. It involves the act of arranging events that fashion a plot,  
35 that collates and narrates one's life experiences in order to make sense of the world, setting  
36 its' own protocols and coherence, constantly in a state of flux, looking back whilst projecting  
37 forwards, negotiating and adapting but contained within the author's temporal present  
38 (Ricoeur, 1992; Mallett and Wapshott, 2011).  
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45 Here we distinguish between ipse and idem identity, between '*the self*' and '*the same*'  
46 (Ricoeur, 1992: 117-8) or a generalised other that is dynamic and constructs roles in  
47 response to our interactions with others. A dynamic defining who I am but changing  
48 through time and space, shaped to the needs to accommodate the generalised other,  
49 altering from moment to moment (ipse – the self). This retains a sense of sameness, with  
50 change going unnoticed but producing an evolving autobiography. Our fixed idem is shaped  
51 by our memories which in turn influences our expectations, and although we feel the same  
52 person, we are different, maintaining a sustained sense of selfhood (idem – the same)  
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3 entwined narrative based episodic stories that shapes us and re-shapes us without end  
4 (Ricoeur, 1991). This is a subtle journey, where the tensions of difference provide greater  
5 insight in to understanding the full dimensions and consequences of personal identity. It  
6 uncovers an inherent multiplicity in our personal identities governed by our perceptions of  
7 contexts; we perceive, act and present ourselves differently dependent on our needs, wants  
8 and goals. Each time our stories are told we present the potential of a multitude of  
9 cascading and competing narratives to be created, facilitating the enactment of an evolving  
10 narrative of overlapping and subsuming plots exerting a pervasive influence on our  
11 unfolding day-to-day life and world outlook.  
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21 Ricoeur, (1984) introduces St Augustine's 'threefold present' (the past, present and future)  
22 and Aristotle's Poetics and emplotment and mimesis; (prefiguration of collective references;  
23 (present) presenting competing fictions to be navigated and negotiated, engendering a re-  
24 configuration of the future. The process creating a subjective and complex interweaving of  
25 fictional and historical narrative interpreted from the narrator's perspective (as author and  
26 the subject) fashioning a personal imaginative representation of the real world. A polyadic  
27 reflexivity (Laitinen, 2007) generating a dynamic and mediated narrative, continually  
28 integrating and mediating meaning (Mallett and Wapshott 2011); a narrative that moves  
29 between contrasting interpretations of the world and one's place within it, a shape-shifting  
30 epistemology that provides a broader plurality of meaning (Hefner, 2014) presenting  
31 radically contrasting interpretations and realignment challenges (Geertz, 1973).  
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42 Fluidity of personal interpretations can lever power to or from the author's past depending  
43 on the strength of their personal belief and the current context, presenting hegemonic  
44 tensions between individuals and their current dominated groups (Clegg, 1989) as a shared  
45 narrative is fashioned between groups (Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Brown et al., 2005).  
46 From this we develop our dispositions and life habits and social groupings, establishing our  
47 individual and collective actions and rituals, what we do and who we do it with.  
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54 Interpretations of being are idiosyncratic in nature but are also shaped by the local context  
55 and therefore can be seen to be constructed of and constituted by our local backgrounds.  
56 This includes our relations and interactions with others (Walker, 2012) thereby enacting a  
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3 transient self, a collaboratively shaped and constructed self that cannot be defined without  
4 reference to others (Ybema et al., 2009). This provides temporal definitions of who we are,  
5 who we want to be, who we are not an intersubjective and dialogical attainment of self that  
6 provides interpretations of meaning that are concurrently historically and culturally situated  
7 (Forster, 2011) but gradually shifting.  
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13 Ricoeur's theory has considerable relevance to veterans and how they engage in their  
14 civilian employment and how they reflect on their past and future through the prism on  
15 now. Personal identity is shaped through subtle socialisation processes (Sveningsson and  
16 Alvesson, 2003) as individuals continually review their sense of self. This is fashioned by  
17 their personal desires set within context to the social interactions with others, therefore  
18 they are exposed to the challenges of the background organisational context (Ybema et al.,  
19 2009).  
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28 Higate (2012) provides insight in to the nature and extent of military and militarized  
29 masculinity across a range of contexts from the war to the mundane and every day (Arkin  
30 and Dobrovsky 1990; Higate and Henry 2009). Militarised practice, tradition and espoused  
31 values contribute to the construction of intra-masculine bonds within a wider hierarchy of  
32 men through norm-bound practices that cement through time and space heteronormative  
33 relations among its members.  
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40 The importance of developing a strong group cohesion and commitment as a means of  
41 gaining a sustainable advantage in a war zone cannot be underestimated, however this is  
42 not attained without running the risk of broader personal and social consequences, as there  
43 will be unintended consequences of training individuals in the art of physical combat. For  
44 example, groups create inter-group hierarchies through framing the inferiority of 'others'  
45 thereby projecting that the enemy is inferior to you, and thereby reinforcing the belief that  
46 the ensuing combat will have a positive outcome thus strengthening morale and personal  
47 resolve and commitment.  
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56 As a means of deepening understanding of military identity the concept of fratriarchy  
57 provides insights (Dussel 2007). Fratriarchy is a fusion of 'patriarchy' and 'fraternity'  
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3 depicting a close relationship within male groups that is devoid of children or women. The  
4 roles of caring and sharing life with loved ones is also absent from the immediacy of the  
5 group (Remy 1990) and is pre-occupied with interests other than paternity and parenting  
6 (Hearn 1998). Such groups emanate patriarchal values a dominance of male moral  
7 authority, social privilege and power control, but unlike a father dominant group, men rule  
8 as brothers providing an environment where men can compete but also provide a united  
9 front detached from the 'others' (Jordan and Cowan 1995: 727).

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17 Evidence suggests that some members remain '*psychologically trapped in fraternal*  
18 *fellowship [with some] thriving on the conflict and aggression characteristic of . . . male*  
19 *association*' (Jewkes 2005: 48 cited in Higate, 2012), and will seek out such fratriarchy  
20 linking back to their former military career.  
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26 Higate's research related to civilian security firms working in Iraq but similar association can  
27 be made to other groups. For example, employment in uniformed services or civilian firms  
28 linked to the military, or joining associations and other groups i.e. reserve forces, military  
29 associated cadet forces, regimental federations etc. Parallels can be drawn with the  
30 heteronormative fratriarchy nature of such groups; likewise, such associations are not  
31 devoid of social or political context particularly as they reinforce old legacies. Whilst one  
32 cannot make vast generalisations as to the impact these associations will have, they do  
33 present a pervasive background or contributing factor that can influence veterans entering  
34 and working in an unfamiliar civilian environment.  
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44 Walker (2012) conducted research with 28 service personnel preparing to leave the military,  
45 identifying five categories 'Constructive Typology' of pre-exit orientations:-  
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49 a) **Transformed:** - those who suggested that they were better or superior to civilians  
50 and that they would deal with the transition process, were committed to the change  
51 and that the military had made them in to what they are, a real soldier; a pragmatic  
52 individual a cut above (civilians) that will wade in and get things done.  
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3     **b) Soldier Scam:** - those that felt there they were not “real soldiers” (mainly from non-  
4     teeth arms i.e. infantry or armoured regiments) in part they distanced themselves  
5     from the stereotypical warrior military figure.  
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8     **c) No-difference:** - those who claimed service has had little effect on self-conceptions,  
9     these individuals had limited career progression an even gave examples of discipline  
10    problems, but still have conformed to the military system across the length of their  
11    service.  
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13    **d) Disavowed:** - a routine change in their life rendered continuing in service untenable  
14    – this included marriage or childbirth.  
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16    **e) Blighted:** - a disruptive event forced a change, injury, ill-health, trauma and mental  
17    illness, potentially detached from current circumstances.  
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24    The typology provides a range of interpretations of personal history underpinning different  
25    but consistent narratives of army life from which future career and life style projections  
26    grow. Walker’s work reinforced the sustained belief in a military identify, which in part  
27    projects a stable coherence of who they are, their contribution and who they are not. Even  
28    though their individual military experiences were very different and provide different career  
29    trajectories there was still a common underpinning belief.  
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36    Critical is the understanding of the power of military coherence, an established and  
37    accepted common belief that provides idiosyncratic congruence for its members. However,  
38    personal congruency needs to provide a positive yet realistic perspective of the current and  
39    future self, thereby providing the veteran with the essential building blocks to enable them  
40    to move from a relatively stable career environment to a more uncertain career, and  
41    possibly holistic, life style change.  
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#### 48    **Methodology**

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50    A subjectivist ontology was adopted employing an interpretivist epistemology to give  
51    emphasis to the nature and form of local and specific co-constructed realities, which  
52    enabled the research to expose insights as to meaning shaping through the dynamics of  
53    social relationships between individuals (Burr, 2003). This enabled the reflexive multiplicity  
54    of interpretations developing the context, depth, and local knowledge (Ramey & Grubb,  
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3 2009), through the medium of language as it simultaneously constructs and is constructed  
4 by a local reality (Gee, 2005). This brings to the foreground interpretive and co-authored  
5 reflexive processes as a way to explore participants' constructs of meaning with specific  
6 reference to a more polyadic reflexivity allowing sharing and deliberating on a number of  
7 interpretations of meanings.  
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13 Coaching interventions were selected as they presented a suitable time, environment and  
14 engagement format, they focused on the individual with an emphasis in gaining deep  
15 learning insights through the development of supportive and authentic interpersonal  
16 dialogue. Coachee's engaged in 2 sessions over an 8 week period as part of an exploration  
17 in to coaching practice with the aim to provide them with insights in to how it could be used  
18 to enhance and develop their skills and improve their personal effectiveness. This included  
19 reflecting on their military learning and experience in context to their civilian life. All  
20 participants were made aware of the context and value of the research and that they would  
21 retain anonymity and informed consent was sought and gained.  
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31 Coaching interventions enable others to gain and share deeper insights in to their world,  
32 from which they can develop new ways of interpreting, feeling and engaging with life and  
33 their situation (Schein, 2006). This is achieved through the medium of facilitating a  
34 supportive dialogue and honest feedback (Garvey and Garrett-Harris, 2008); it provides a  
35 foreground for the coachee to build awareness and sensemaking that helps the coachee to  
36 grow (Bluckert, 2006; Reissner, 2008) by providing the clarity to look at past events and  
37 assign a new meaning to them.  
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46 The work is based on the coaching of five veterans from infantry backgrounds who have a  
47 similar range of experiences with length of service ranging from 8-15 years. All had a  
48 minimum of 6 years veteran experience in relatively low skilled occupations. The two  
49 experiential periods (as serving members of the military and a civilian (veteran)) provided  
50 participants with sufficient time to have developed a clear identification with the military  
51 and to have experience of transition in to civilian working environments. This provided an  
52 opportunity to explore their past and current perceptions of self, their experience of civilian  
53 life and the potential legacies and echoes of the personal identity military service had  
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3 endowed them. The coaching method, with its developmental ethos, encouraged  
4 participants to fully engage in the conversations, which were later analysed developing the  
5 themes of enquiry employing a similar method employed by Walker (2012)  
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10 The emphasis on meaning required a journey of narrative exploring the veterans' pasts  
11 (military and civilian), present, and anticipated future. The environment provided a  
12 collegiate and familiar space to build rapport to encourage participants to freely articulate  
13 their stories. Quasi-civilian/military vernacular was evident and employed to elucidate  
14 events and enrich meaning. Profanities or military idioms were not discouraged but  
15 appreciated as part of their linguistic repertoire helping participants to articulate and  
16 elaborate on events providing depth and insight in to how they make sense of their world.  
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#### 24 **Analysis of Findings**

25 We provide a selection of micro-narrative extracts from conversations with all five veterans  
26 which have been grouped in to two sections; firstly veterans' reflections on the past and  
27 secondly their reflections on the present and future to provide insights in to their  
28 interpretations of the world.  
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##### 35 1. Reflections on the Past

###### 36 **a. Participant A (Ex-Warrant Officer - postman):**

37 *I enjoyed my time in the army, I made some good friends.*

38 *We knew how to work and play hard, ... there were bad days; weather conditions did not  
39 help but you all mucked in and you knew who you could rely on particularly when the chips  
40 were down.*

41 *I still miss the old days but I don't think I would go back. I am quite a bit older now, and I am  
42 not as fit.*

43 *It was good to work in the regiment ... you felt you were really doing something that  
44 mattered.*

###### 45 **b. Participant B (Ex-Sergeant – lorry driver):**

46 *I am proud of my regiment what we did, we always got the job done ... I think we made a  
47 difference.*

48 *I've done my bit now.*

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3 I felt it taught me about leadership and commitment, but also what trust is all about.

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5 **c. Participant C (Ex-Sergeant – warehouse worker):**

6 Had a blood good time, running up and down the hills, lots of action, shooting and beer!

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8 I had some good NCO's who really knew their stuff and could be relied on ... we knew how to  
9 get the job done.

10  
11 I remember one time one of the Junior NCO's got burnt, pretty bad ... we had to do first aid  
12 and get him evacuated pronto ... worked like a dream, good team we know what to do. We  
13 also had some good back up ... good planning and execution ... the kit was there when we  
14 needed it ... never get that in civvy land.

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18 **d. Participant D (Ex-Sergeant – retired businessman):**

19 Difficult to say why they were good times, it was tough. But we always got the job done ... it  
20 seemed to bring us together ... living together 24/7 you get to know your buddies ... you sort  
21 of know what they are thinking ... a team.

22  
23 Just a good set of mates.

24  
25 I miss it but life moves on.

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28 **e. Participant E (Ex-Sergeant – driver):**

29 I really enjoyed the adventure and teamwork ... living life to the full. I felt we made a  
30 difference.

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35 All five extracts demonstrated a journey into their personal histories. Firstly by invoking  
36 images of a past masculine self; extracts such as “work and play hard”, “when the chips were  
37 down”, “living life to the full”, “good times, it was tough” and “I am not as fit”. These  
38 stories’ also demonstrated undertones reinforcing both a deep seated comradeship and  
39 fraternal association with their peers and the development of a sense of purpose “really  
40 doing something that mattered”. Combined with evidence of collective shared hardship  
41 reinforcing a key theme “there were bad days” ... “mucked in”, “knew who you could rely  
42 on”, “when the chips were down”, “the kit was there when we needed it” marking their place  
43 in time. This demonstrates a personal demarcation, marking a personal and collective  
44 presence in time and space; making a stand in a challenging world where you and your  
45 peers are collaboratively accountable to each other and can be relied upon. Clearly, these  
46 personal reflections invoke a series of properties that individuals apply to themselves, ones  
47 that are reinforced through the interpretations and reinterpretations of events of their past,  
48 a re-constructed authorship of their personal and possible projected heroic self.  
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5 There was evidence of a great pragmatic drive towards getting things done, demonstrating  
6 professional skills, that they were well trained to surmount the tasks set, and that they  
7 worked within a strong 'band of brothers' relationship, clearly linking to a fictive kinship but  
8 also providing an authenticity of collaborative action. They stood together (when others did  
9 not) and that they rose to the call and stood at a significant event, projecting the image of  
10 the military as a personal calling rather than employment (Biderman, 1959).  
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17 This identifies themes and differentiates from who they are not, reinforcing a time and a  
18 state of *civilian other*, those who did not and were not. Such statements were absent when  
19 describing their civilian past, reinforcing different relationships and sense of purpose.  
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24 We can also note how "the regiment" provides a specific personal reference point, not to  
25 the military but to the individual's particular unit or battalion, a much more specific niche  
26 grouping. This links to Walker (2012) typology where participants hold themselves as being  
27 "*real*" soldiers having seen action and therefore holding authentic credentials rather than a  
28 "*soldier scam*". The latter are those who in part claim they are not real soldiers, i.e. those  
29 holding an appointment as a clerk or working in a back office role in the military, presenting  
30 a difference from what they would define as a hard extreme military profile. The former  
31 can present an image that the military has permanently changed them for the good and that  
32 they are "*a cut above*" (Ibid. p.293) who will make their mark on the world as they get  
33 things done.  
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44 Such narratives are indicative of a nostalgic reminiscence of the past, "*I still miss the old*  
45 *days*" and a realisation that things had moved on, "*I don't think I would go back*" but with a  
46 justification of being "*not as fit*", possibly suggesting a loss of masculine status and personal  
47 pride reinforcing a change to civilian status.  
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53 What is apparent is that narrative identity was derived from deeds and activities, the action  
54 of being a soldier, in what you do, who you were with, where you were at important  
55 moments in time and the hardship you suffered. This can be seen to challenge the current  
56 notions of military identities as being based on factors such as race or class following similar  
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3 themes to Woodward and Jenkins (2011) but this is also reinforcing the notion that the  
4 military are practical beings (Ricoeur 1984) who identify with what they do.  
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9 2. Reflections on the Present and Future

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11 **a. Participant A (Ex-Warrant Officer - postman):**

12 *I enjoy being a postman like to get out and about ... keeps me fit ... don't get a lot*  
13 *(remuneration) but with my pension I'm fine ... I'm really just looking for retirement*

14  
15 *I would tell them to get their arse in gear! (joke), they need to give some leadership and*  
16 *commitment to their people.*

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18 *It's like watching children at play – sometimes just hopeless.*

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21 **b. Participant B (Ex-Sergeant – lorry driver):**

22 *I enjoy my job and there is nothing really wrong with being a civvy ... sometime I feel it is not*  
23 *enough ... definitely not exciting ... but the pay is good and I enjoy being with the family.*

24  
25 *Sometimes I do feel there are lots of meetings, lots of talking but no one really gets on with*  
26 *it.*

27  
28 *Don't think that grasp what leadership is all about.*

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31 **c. Participant C (Ex-Sergeant - warehouse worker):**

32 *It is nothing like the military in civvy world ... they do their best but they really do not have*  
33 *team work, you need to live with folk to really get that.*

34  
35 *"They only have one pace ... don't seem to get urgent".*

36  
37 *I'm just a driver ... I don't have to be particularly motivated at work ... don't think they have*  
38 *any idea of what I have done ... offered to do stuff but they do not get it"*

39  
40 *"Think I could help on the planning and speeding up lead times ... also could motivate the*  
41 *troops ... bit stronger leadership*

42  
43 *"I think I have many skills I could offer them ... but it is too much effort"*

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46 **d. Participant D (Ex-Sergeant – retired businessman):**

47 *I know with my business I could get contracts because I could turn things around quickly and*  
48 *I did a good job, think it gave me a lot of advantage ... I just got on with it and the clients like*  
49 *this.*

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51  
52 *Often the clients had simple problems but just could not get their act together ... I think my*  
53 *ex-military experience gave me considerable advantage.*

54  
55 *I was willing to stick my neck out and take a chance and get on with it something they*  
56 *seemed unwilling to do.*

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3 **e. Participant E (Ex-Sergeant – driver):**  
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5 *Works OK but I do not feel as motivated as when I was in the regiment. When I left I was*  
6 *under no delusion of what I was coming to.*  
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10 Clear distinctions were made by veterans of their time in their military past and their civilian  
11 present, a theme that cascaded through the transition process was that military personnel  
12 did not expect to gain high levels of satisfaction from their civilian occupation (Jolly 1996) a  
13 theme that was supported in the veterans coaching sessions.  
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18 There appeared to be a clear conflict between perceptions of what 'real' team-work or  
19 leadership is supposed to be (military) and what civilians practice, with comments such as;  
20 "watching children at play", "sometimes just hopeless", and "they really do not have team  
21 work". There was a constant comparison to their past for final definitions and examples of  
22 how they understood real teamwork, with a focus on getting things done, demonstrating an  
23 inference that civilians could not quite get it right.  
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30 This also created personal challenges with the "civilian other" reinforced by; "they do not  
31 get it", "they only have one pace", "no one really gets on with it", "get their arse in gear",  
32 "like watching children at play", "sometimes just hopeless" "bit stronger leadership" and "I  
33 just got on with it". The stories positioned the military as being the superior route but also  
34 demonstrated a background belief that the civilian way was either wrong or not fully  
35 appropriate and that civilians needed more motivation, projecting an implication of  
36 inferiority. Further, there appeared to be an absence of fictive kinship within a civilian  
37 environment affecting the veteran's sense of belonging. This did appear to be something  
38 the coachees have come to terms with but that this is a missed element of their 'lives',  
39 which may well hinder developing civilian relationships. What was interesting was the  
40 comment, "but it is too much effort", almost abrogating a responsibility to actively engage in  
41 their civilian world, becoming complacent to their fate.  
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53 What did appear in all cases was not an alienation to the civilian world but a passive  
54 acceptance of events. Walker's (2012) work on final year soldiers identified that they  
55 anticipated a down scaling of job role, personal status and a feeling of loss creating a sense  
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3 of anxiety for their future which could invoke a process of confirmation bias (Nickerson,  
4 1998) therefore their past experience shapes both how they see the world and what they  
5 will expect to see. It was obvious that the five veterans' current world shaped their  
6 expectations but the degree of influence from the past was significant and, building on the  
7 work of Walker, reinforced the important influence their past had on their aspirations of  
8 career progression as a civilian/veteran.  
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16 What did appear was a conflicting desire to return to military life but a lack of willingness to  
17 actually do it, likewise their history was used both to enhance their status but also to  
18 reminisce on how that world was providing a certainty and moral position. What was  
19 apparent were only minimal reflections on the bad times in the forces; this could indicate a  
20 degree of selective and possibly embellished authorship, a reseeded of vivid memories of  
21 the past, a key feature of Ricoeur's Narrative Identity. Even though the past in itself could  
22 be seen to be unstable and fleeting, it provided a point of reference to contrast their civilian  
23 present, a platform to base current and future interactions upon. In so doing, this creates a  
24 dynamic tension that challenges and redefines preconceived constructs that initially appear  
25 stable but are temporal and illusive and thereby undermine the core of veteran's sense of  
26 self and creating greater vulnerability. The comment, "*but it is too much effort*", could well  
27 demonstrate the impact of the clash of identities has on the veteran with a defence  
28 mechanism to disengage being the consequence. Veterans clearly demonstrated acts of  
29 reflexive identity accessing their past in part to interpret and make sense of their current  
30 position and future, it was clear history showed a strong regard or even yearning for the  
31 past and was employed to benchmark and reinforce a coherent sense of self. Veterans  
32 made references to status, teamwork and the 'civvy' other, which clearly reinforced  
33 parallels to the dynamic of convergence or divergence between national militaries and their  
34 civil societies (Moskos, 1977).  
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51 The veterans did not indicate great difficulty in gaining employment but most did indicate  
52 that they felt the jobs they undertook were not fully on a par to their military roles; this  
53 point of reference did not appear to help them in their transition, reinforcing the work Jolly,  
54 (1996), Wolpert, (2000) and Walker, (2012).  
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## Discussion

The interviews exposed how stories act as key instruments to establish and reinforce personal and social identity. Further, the influence of Ricoeur's threefold mimesis was evident across the interviews, firstly uncovering the power and legacy of a pre-narrative framework (mimesis state 1, (predating the individual)) reinforcing traditions and providing collective references (idem) from which the present (mimesis state 2) will be viewed.

The 'mimesis state 2' presents competing and socially contextualising interpretations that shape self-identity through culturally and socially mediated self-definitions, drawn from their new civilian world that influence the re-seeing of self (ipse) and the past (selfhood and sameness). However, the author is both object and storyteller (in the present both lived and told (Ricoeur, 1991)) influencing accounts of events and circumstances (Ricoeur, 1987) though a blurring of constituting events, entwining facts and fictions, the author and the reader presenting a flux of vying interpretations. In turn this struggle of the past and present influences (mimesis state 3) a re-configuration and projection of the future.

One of the opportunities is for the coach to help the coachee to explore their journey as both object and storyteller (Ricoeur, 1992) but to raise awareness that the coachee is the recipient of such story's and how they influence the shaping of life projections. Such narrative based approach might encourage academics and practitioners alike to apply a more holistic and reinvigorated approach to organizational theory (Czarniawska, 1998) by providing insights in to the power of collective and personal narratives that fashion story's that embed meaning, purpose and expectations in everyday working life.

Such insights can reinforce the role of the coach as co-author who can help individuals to reflect and reseat the narratives of the past, assign a new meaning and expose a more positive present, from which a more realistic and attainable vision of the future can be projected.

In context to the veteran and their past, it would be difficult to see a more institutionally socialised group who through the establishment of traditions gain a clear sense of personal identity set within a stable organisational context. The challenges of this deeply engrained



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3 past identity is that, whilst they project a superficial stable state, they are in fact temporal in  
4 nature and therefore present the potential to create long-term post-exit vulnerability.  
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8 All participants indicated a loss of social status and a fictive kinship but also an undermining  
9 of personal values and purpose. The nature of belief in their distinctiveness (Biderman,  
10 1959) to the level of calling and the importance they placed on their 'pragmatic', 'will do'  
11 attitude reinforce a hero like self. The work raises important questions as to the nature and  
12 consequences of such fundamental lifestyle change and how this loss of the past  
13 undermines self-worth and vision of the future, presenting a challenge to veterans who  
14 perceive they are embarking on a 'non-distinctive' civilian second career, a distinction that  
15 appears to be formed well before they leave the military.  
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24 An area overlooked in other research is the nature of veteran's pre-services past. What was  
25 apparent from discussion was a strong association with historically situated and male  
26 dominated social class backgrounds and how this affected their lives. Association can be  
27 seen to hegemonic masculinity. (Connell and Messerschmid, 2005) Whilst the concept is not  
28 without criticism military institutions do reinforce strong masculine traits a pattern echoed  
29 in working class society. Veterans often return to such family and social groups on leaving  
30 the military, presenting dual stories further reinforcing old stereotypes shaping the past in  
31 the present, which can be even more complex as the pre-services past will have also  
32 undergone change.  
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42 Veterans do provide a distinct example of the challenges faced in transition but these are  
43 not alone. Most individuals will have backgrounds that influence their personal identity  
44 which may hamper life transition. Rancour's work can contribute to a range of contexts,  
45 from coaching elite groups through career transition such as in lost status through  
46 bankruptcy, redundancy or retirement or in supporting cultural or lifestyle transition for  
47 example for immigrants, refugees or those suffering from trauma. It can also help a coach's  
48 own life journey and that of their relationship with coachees, particularly in gaining insights  
49 in to the magnitude of the change and challenges they encounter that have history set  
50 beyond the working environment.  
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3 The impact of personal identity can be profound, it was evident that all veterans reached  
4 deep in to their past to benchmark their current work roles. It was also evident that the  
5 process of life style change is not total detachment and many veterans retained their ties to  
6 the regiment by attendance at regimental days, federations, social media or special events  
7 such as the annual remembrance parade. However, such connections could be a double-  
8 edged sword, both helping veterans adjust to civilian life by providing support but also  
9 reinforcing a deep kinship with old comrades who inadvertently reinforce generic  
10 stereotypes.

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19 Generally, military careers provide secure, stable and coherent social framework that  
20 reinforces an institutionalised self-belief and commitment to a common cause, reinforcing a  
21 communitarian theme. The initial commitment for a recruit is set by the public  
22 proclamation of an oath of allegiance, swearing by God to "*be faithful and bear true*  
23 *allegiance*" to the monarch (state), as if a personal calling. This undertaking is bolstered  
24 through recruit training, entering the regimental system and wearing a common uniform,  
25 systemically reinforcing a common collective identity setting military personnel apart from  
26 others and fashions a common sense of self and collective purpose, as well as establishing  
27 accepted norms and rules for personal conduct. Such rules are further reinforced through  
28 peer influence creating a social web that can constrain or enable human action, imposed  
29 through a constant living and cohesive narrative that underpins a common social state. This  
30 not only defines what is or is not permitted, but also who is included and excluded. Thereby  
31 who is inferior and superior, reinforcing a past history and establishing a legacy of deep-  
32 seated beliefs that stay with an individual throughout their lives.

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46 This sustained institutionalisation provides a background that fashions a cohesive sense of  
47 the individual and collective self (Walker, 2012) with individuals depicting themselves as  
48 self-reliant members of a warrior class, who have demonstrated their worthiness through  
49 their acts and deeds. Veterans can portray themselves as practitioners of a martial craft  
50 holding a 'special' professional competency and that they have made a committed  
51 contribution to nationhood (Zirker et al; 2008). This reinforces the notion of personal  
52 presence, firstly that they were present at a significant national or global event and secondly  
53 they played as significant role in it, (Woodward and Jenkins, 2011) they stood and were  
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3 accounted for alongside their 'comrades in arms' a band of brothers reinforcing a close  
4 fictive kinship. This has significance as it infers who was not there, therefore who are  
5 excluded from the military group i.e. the lack of civilian presence that projects 'the civvy' as  
6 the outcast. This can also be seen to be reinforced in other aspects of broader social  
7 culture "*shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here, and hold their manhood cheap*"  
8 (Shakespeare, 1559, Act IV Scene iii 18–67).  
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15 Such self-authored belief systems that veterans ascribe to themselves sets their future  
16 legacy, for example, many leavers have low expectations of becoming civilians (Walker,  
17 2012) living in a world of the parochial and mundane which can invoke many challenges for  
18 personal adjustment unleashing feelings of anxiety, fear, despair and shame. Such  
19 perspectives expose veterans to the perils of confirmatory bias, which limit expectations  
20 and life trajectories, summoning the need for a more informed and critical introspective to  
21 be taken, often lacking in leavers (Jolly, 1996).  
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30 All interviewees expressed feelings of loss and a nostalgia for what had been, they  
31 expressed their acceptance for their civilian predicament and acknowledge that they had to  
32 adjust to the demands of a new civilian world.  
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37 As the veteran takes on the role of author, their stories of the past and projections of the  
38 future can evolve. Identity is constructed in a social context through discourse with others  
39 raising the need for arbitration and reconciliation as they negotiate meaning to make sense  
40 of their new worlds. This exposes veterans to a dynamic tension of instability and  
41 inequitably that can expose inherent vulnerability to the shaping of their (and continually  
42 moving) post-exit identity. Veterans new civilian peers often have minimal, possibly media  
43 based, exposure to a military world, therefore have difficulty in comprehending or valuing a  
44 veteran's history, experience, emotional exposure or social/moral worth, this presents many  
45 challenges from not knowing what is not known to conflicting dialogues and tainted  
46 interpretations.  
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56 All 5 veterans had links to veteran associations and whilst these provided support they also  
57 presented the dilemma of a counter narrative, allowing them to reinforce and re-play their  
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3 past story's with their old peers. Here the relationships reinforce the echoes of the past,  
4 rekindle kinships and faith with the cause.  
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### 8 **Conclusion**

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10 The research contribution is that it provided insight into how veterans' past and current  
11 background provides a rich framework for the conceptualisation of military identities. In  
12 line with previous studies veterans' narratives stress their uniqueness and difference as  
13 resilient action orientated individuals which also provides insight as to how veterans see  
14 civilian others. The work reinforced the conceptualisation of military identities and how  
15 their social categories emerged within the lived military experience. This in turn presents  
16 legacies for future life. It also reinforces how through talk we can gain vivid insights in to  
17 how these relationships and identities unfold.  
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26 Ricoeur's work refocused our attention at a micro level, how through talk we can explore  
27 the subjectivities of veterans personal military identities unfold. This provides valuable  
28 insights in to the nature of veterans past (idem) and the tensions and challenges they  
29 experience through their day-to-day lives. The work reinforces and extends the work of  
30 Woodward and Jenkins (2003) that veteran identities link to practice and the act of being  
31 present, taking a moral stand, but also demonstrates the on going influence of the  
32 fraternity (Higate, 2003). Finally, the work supports Walker (2012) research 'constructive  
33 typology' particularly individuals who described themselves as a cut above civilians. What  
34 was also apparent for veterans was a nostalgic sense of loss for the past and an awareness  
35 of a lack of acknowledgement by their civilian peers, in part, presenting a need for  
36 recognition, exposing how deep ties of fictive kinship and legacy remain well beyond  
37 physically leaving the military world.  
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49 The implication for the practitioner is that the works provide another perspective from  
50 which to understand, engage and employ a pool of human resources that may well be  
51 overlooked and undervalued. This raises the need for employers to explore the history and  
52 implicit experience their employees bring to the company, attributes and virtues that  
53 appear not be fully captured in a conventional CV or verbalised by veterans in the  
54 workplace. This highlights that one cannot assume that two similar cultures share a fully  
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3 common language and that there are linguistic nuances, subtle shades of meaning, which  
4 distort interpretation yet appear superficially to present a common meaning. This exposes  
5 the need for fine-grained understanding of narrative as a tool to achieve a greater depth of  
6 engagement, seeing the employee as more than a functional economic resource. Such  
7 engagement would not merely make economic sense but would also appear to enhance  
8 employee personal commitment and well-being (Alfes, 2010) which could be a generic  
9 benefit for the whole work force.  
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17 The work raises a call for research in to a veterans 'pre-enlistment' past to gain a deeper  
18 understanding of the background social legacies. Educational attainment among soldiers is  
19 much lower than the national average (MoD, 2004) as many enlistees come  
20 disproportionately from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (DCSF, 2009:31)  
21 some with an increased risk of social exclusion (Agulnik et al., 2002) and some who join the  
22 military as a last resort. What this exposes is that their past is more than their military  
23 service and their 'pre-enlistment' state may present a default position on returning to a  
24 civilian world, a secondary default position, assumed as a static place but one that has now  
25 moved on, presenting a double loss and the potential of having initially nowhere to go.  
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35 Coaching can be a potential tool to both capture the richness of personal experiences and  
36 help personal transition to the benefit of the employer, line managers, working peers and  
37 veterans. Coaching intervention can get beneath the superficial similarities to expose  
38 important underlying differences that can more readily enable adaptation as well as support  
39 the development of a founding plan of action.  
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45 The work exposes the need for greater conceptualisation of narrative identity and how the  
46 narration of the past shapes our future, raising the observation that such approach can be  
47 used to engage with other communities. The work further calls for more research to gain  
48 insights into developing deeper conceptual understanding of personal identify and the  
49 challenges facing employed veterans to integrate within a civilian society. It also suggests  
50 that coaching provides a suitable conduit to gain engagement and support transition for  
51 veterans throughout their employment and help share their experiences with their peers to  
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3 the benefit of the business and that the benefits of such initiatives are captured in future  
4 research.  
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